

foster family HANDBOOK

Alberta

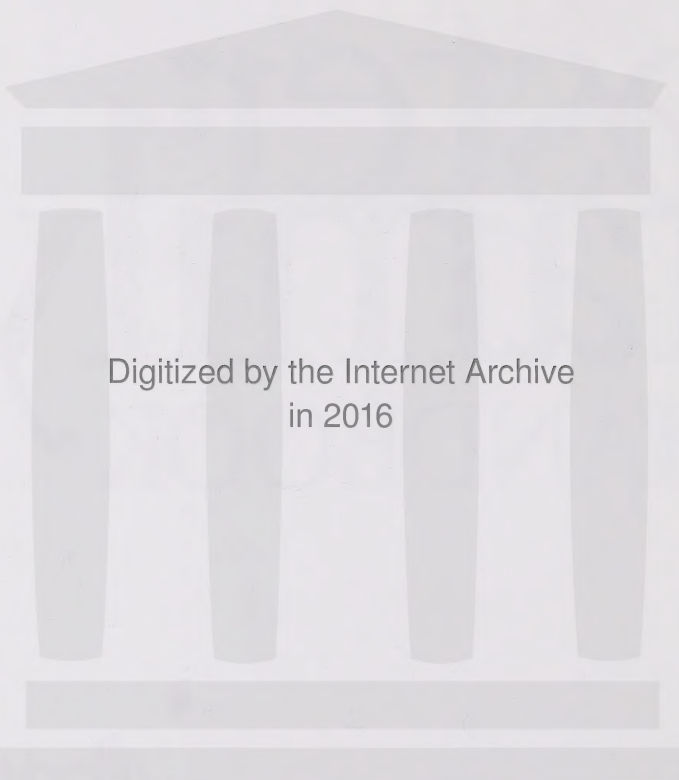
FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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Background to the Foster Family Handbook

The Foster Family Handbook is a guide to the most frequently asked questions about foster care and is not intended as a policy statement. It is an information resource on practical everyday issues and adds to information provided through training by social workers.

The handbook is a manual for new or experienced foster families. The sections provide an overview of foster family care, highlight the responsibility of the foster family, give advice on foster care supports, explain policy, and provide information on other program areas. The various subsections give the foster family an opportunity to learn about their role and how they work with Alberta Family and Social Services to best provide for children in care.

The handbook is a joint effort of the department's six regions and the Alberta Foster Parent Association. Its aim is to help all those involved in foster care understand and appreciate the essential contributions made by the other. The handbook demonstrates the team effort involved in planning, making decisions and placing a foster child.

Introduction

The Foster Family Handbook is designed to answer the questions most frequently asked by foster families. It is only a guide. If you need further information, please call the child's social worker.

Information Cards

For your convenience, information cards are provided in the back of the handbook. The card can be used to record important personal information about the individual child. The child can take the card home when he or she returns there or goes to another placement. The card will provide a bridge or continuity in the child's life by supplying pertinent information. If the child is moved to another home, the information on the card will assist the next foster family in making the child feel more at home. The card may provide information that sometimes gets missed when a child moves. It is one method of recording information and the headings are only suggestions to highlight important events in a child's life. Please add any other items you feel are necessary.

Appendix A shows a suggested format.

Alberta Family and Social Services

Alberta Family and Social Services exists to protect and promote the social well-being of Albertans. It does this by developing and administering statutory and mandated social service programs which encourage and support individual and family independence and self-reliance.

The department has established a number of programs which provide services to meet this mandate. This includes Child Welfare Services. Child Welfare Services exists to ensure that the survival, security and development of children are protected. Its responsibilities include child protection services, foster care, adoptions and many other areas involving children and families.

The department is divided into six geographic areas: the Northeast, Northwest, Edmonton, Central, Calgary and South regions. Each region has a regional director to whom the Minister delegates responsibility for the care of children in that area who need protective services. The regional directors, in turn delegate specific responsibilities to managers, social workers, foster families, etc.

The Child Welfare Act

• The Child Welfare Act is the legal authority for providing child welfare services in Alberta. It requires the provision of services which can be expected to correct or relieve the problem that caused the children to be in need of protective services.

• The principles of the Child Welfare Act guide social workers in their work with families. The Child Welfare Act stresses the importance of the family. It provides for support services to families to ensure that a child will only be removed from home if other, less intrusive measures, are not sufficient to protect the child. The Child Welfare Act specifies the circumstances under which a child may be in need of protection through the department.

• The Child Welfare Act reflects an appreciation of the strong contributions foster parents make to children in care. Foster parents' access to the Appeal Panel, joint guardianship, participation in court hearings and involvement in case planning are some of the areas where the voluntary contributions of foster families are encouraged.

• The Child Welfare Amendment Act of September, 1989 established the role of the Children's Advocate. The Advocate attempts to ensure that the views and interests of children are heard and represented. Foster parents and/or children in care can contact the Advocate to discuss problems and concerns. Pages 20 and 21 of this handbook describe the Advocate's responsibilities.

Purpose of the Foster Care Program

- The goals of the Foster Care Program reflect the philosophy of the Child Welfare Act.
- The Foster Care Program is based on the belief that a family and community is the most beneficial and desirable environment for raising a child. A foster family is a temporary family for a child who cannot remain with his/her own family. The supportive atmosphere of a foster home assists a child in developing healthy self-esteem and offers a positive model on which a child can pattern values and behavior.
- The goal of the program is to return a child to his/her own family as soon as possible. Where this is not feasible, alternate permanent life plans for the child are made. These can include placement with a relative; adoption; or long term foster care. This process is called permanency planning.
- Planning for a child is a team effort. The team includes the child, the natural family, the foster family and the social worker. Foster care goals can be successfully met when everyone works in a partnership.

An Overview of Foster Family Care

When Does a Child Come Into Care?

Alberta Family and Social Services becomes involved with a family when:

- the family seeks help because it is experiencing difficulty; or
- a member of the community (a neighbor or teacher) makes a referral concerning a child's safety or well-being.

After meeting with the referred family and assessing the child's and family's needs, the social worker (also known as the child's worker, case worker, or child welfare worker) makes recommendations about further involvement with the family. The child is removed from the family only when all reasonable attempts to protect and meet the needs within the family have not been successful or when the child's safety is threatened. The phrase, "coming into care" is often used when a child is removed from his/her family.

Agreements and Court Ordered Status

In order for a child and family to receive help from Child Welfare Services, the child must first be identified as a child in need of protective services as defined in the Child Welfare Act. The social worker may then sign an agreement with the family or apply to court for an order. This agreement or order describes the child's status. There are several different agreements which can be put in place depending on the needs of the child and his/her family.

Agreements

- **Support Agreement (S.A.)**

A social worker may complete a Support Agreement with the parents when they are willing and able to work with Child Welfare Services so the child can remain at home. Support services such as parenting courses, homemakers, or psychologists are provided to the family. In some cases, an agreement can be made with a 16 or 17 year old living independently of his/her guardian. This could occur if a 16 or 17 year old needs supportive services and, by providing these services, his/her

well-being can be protected while he/she continues to live independently of a guardian. Support Agreements can be signed for up to six months. Additional six month periods can be arranged after a review is completed.

- Custody Agreement (C.A.)

The parents agree that in order to ensure the child's needs are met, the child will be placed temporarily out of their home. The parents retain guardianship which means they are actively involved in planning for the child. They are responsible for all guardianship decisions such as medical treatment, schooling, etc. In some cases, a Custody Agreement may be signed with a child 16 years of age or older. Some of the children coming to your home may be under a Custody Agreement. The Custody Agreement can be signed for up to six months and renewed in six month periods. There can not be additional renewals after two years.

The Custody Agreement includes a plan outlining tasks, goals, visits, financial and medical contributions as well as the decisions that may be delegated to the social worker or to the foster family.

- Permanent Guardianship Agreement (P.G.A.)

Parents (often an unmarried mother) may decide to permanently give up rights to a child under the age of six months. A child under this status who is placed in your home will not usually stay long, as most young children are easily placed for adoption.

- Handicapped Children's Services Agreement (H.C.S.)

Handicapped Children's Services Agreements are used to obtain and coordinate services required in planning for a handicapped child. They may assist parents with costs related to a child's handicap. A child covered by this agreement may be placed with you and any services necessary for the child's care will be provided in your home.

Handicapped Children's Services Agreements are the only agreements signed with parents or guardians which do not always entail child protection concerns. In some instances, the demands of caring for a

severely handicapped child may be beyond a family's capability and the family may enter into this type of agreement. When child protection is a concern, a referral is made immediately for an investigation by child welfare.

Court Ordered Status

The court system can be used to determine the best way in which a child's needs will be met. A child can have status under a number of different orders.

- **Apprehension Order (A.O.)**

A social worker will go to a home if the children are thought to need protection. The social worker must confirm the situation. If the parents are not willing or available to look after the security of the children, then the social worker will go to court for an apprehension order. The social worker (and the parents) must appear in court within 10 days of the child being apprehended. Recommendations are made to the court at that time. Children with this status will be placed in your home on a temporary basis.

- **Supervision Order (S.O.)**

The child remains at home, or returns home with a Supervision Order which specifies the home will be supervised by a social worker. The family is ordered by the court to meet certain conditions. Some children leaving your home may be returning to their homes with this status.

- **Temporary Guardianship Order (T.G.O.)**

The child is placed out of the home to ensure the child's needs are met. The parents may or may not agree with the T.G.O. but are expected to work with the social worker and, where possible, the foster family. The goal is to return the child home at the earliest possible time. A temporary guardianship order is granted for a maximum of one year, but it can be extended. The director is the joint guardian and shares the responsibilities for the child with the parents and you as the foster parents.

The maximum time a child may be in care under a Custody Agreement or a Temporary Guardianship Order is two years. Under exceptional circumstances, the court may extend custody up to the maximum of an additional year. If an extension is not granted, or is not sought, permanent status must be obtained with either a permanent plan or the child must be returned home.

- **Permanent Guardianship Order (P.G.O.)**

The child must be placed outside the home to ensure the child's needs are met. It is not anticipated that the child can return home within a reasonable time, therefore the child is placed in the permanent care of the department. This means the director becomes sole guardian of the child. This status is sought after efforts to reunite a child with a natural family fail. A child with this status placed in your home may soon be placed with adoptive parents. In that case, you are asked to work with the child, the adoptive parents and the social worker in making the transition to a new family as early as possible. In other cases, the social worker may discuss with you the possibility of providing a long term home for the child. Both situations require a great deal of commitment by your entire family.

- **Joint Guardianship Order**

If a child is the subject of a P.G.O. or P.G.A., by an adult who has a significant relationship with the child and wants to be involved in guardianship decisions, a Joint Guardianship Order may be sought. Foster families may apply for joint guardianship, however, this order is intended primarily for relatives or others who have had a continuing relationship with the child. The applicants must be able to provide significant benefits to the child. If the child is over 12 years old, his/her consent is necessary.

- **Private Guardianship Order**

A Private Guardianship Order may be sought by an adult who is committed to a long term relationship with the child. The child must be under P.G.O. or P.G.A. status. Usually the child will have lived with the appointed guardian for at least six months.

If you have had long term care of a child, adoption is inappropriate and yet you want to formalize your commitment to the child, you may apply for this order. The social worker can advise you about the procedure. There is no financial support to persons appointed as private guardians and the social worker's involvement ceases.

Matching a Foster Child to a Foster Family

When a child is placed in a foster home, attempts are made to match the child with your family, considering the needs of the child, your strengths and preferences. In some regions, matching is done by a foster care worker.

Prior to placement, you will be provided with information you need to decide whether or not to accept the placement. This notice will also allow you to prepare for the child's arrival. Where age permits, the child is consulted about placement.

When possible, pre-placement visits are arranged. These visits are especially useful for older children, as they help all parties get a sense of whether the match will be successful. Pre-placement visits can make the transition from one caregiver to another easier.

Large family groups tend to be difficult to place and every effort is made to keep siblings together. When this is not possible, foster parents may be asked to assist in maintaining contact between siblings.

What to Expect When a Child is Placed

When a child is placed in your home, you should receive:

- identifying information, e.g. child's name, birthdate, Alberta Health Care Insurance number, Family and Social Services identification number
- reason for child being in care
- school information
- medical needs, e.g. allergies, formula, medication
- summary of what behaviors to expect, habits and possible problems

- needs of the child while in your home
- who will visit the child? how often? where?
- delegation giving authority to foster family to provide routine care
- verbal summary of a plan for the child, often referred to as a case plan

If the information is not provided, check with the social worker as to what information is available. Under some circumstances, such as an emergency apprehension, very little information may be available at the time of placement. Should you learn something about your foster child you feel is important, contact the social worker.

Natural Family

A primary goal of fostering is to provide a child with alternate family care until the child can return to his/her natural family or be permanently placed with another family. Remember part of the care provided by foster families is to do everything possible to support and encourage contact between the natural family and the child. You can also help ease the transition when a child is leaving your home.

Contacts with the natural family are an important way to prepare the child for his/her return home and to keep the child and family connected. The frequency and manner of contacts will vary according to the needs of those involved. You will help the child with visits by remaining non-judgmental. By showing your support, the child will not feel like he/she has to choose between families.

It is helpful to the natural parents if you keep them informed of their child's activities through notes, a journal, pictures, or verbal reports. This contact assists them in feeling part of their child's life and helps the child's adjustment back to his/her family. Even when the permanency plan is a permanent placement with a long term foster family, contact with the natural family may still be important and you should follow the direction of the social worker in this regard.

The responsibilities of the natural family in areas such as finances, health care and visits are addressed in case plans, court orders and

- agreements. The social worker will advise you of the specific responsibilities.

Native Children

When a Native child is placed in your home, it is important to discuss with the worker the individual needs of the child in relation to his/her heritage. Your support in linking him/her to a variety of cultural activities and to his/her home community is essential. If you are not familiar with Native culture, participation in a Native awareness course may assist you in supporting a child's need to explore cultural values and ethnic attitudes. If a child is a member of a band and a member of a reserve, decisions regarding the child are to be made in consultation with the band.

Contact the child's social worker for a resource list of Native cultural activities in your area.

Role of Social Workers

The social worker is your primary contact person. Depending on your region or district office, one social worker may fulfill many functions. In some district offices, the duties performed by social workers may be divided into specialized roles. Where roles are specialized, you are likely to have more than one social worker. It may be confusing unless you understand the different duties of social workers.

a) Social Worker/Foster Care Worker

- recruits and approves foster families
- matches foster children to foster families
- provides ongoing support and training to foster families
- completes annual evaluations of foster families

b) Social Worker/Intake Worker/Screeners

- receives concerns about a family or a child in need of protection
- gives the referral to an investigating social worker for follow-up

c) *Social Worker/Investigator*

- contacts the referred family, gathers information, does a family assessment, determines whether the child needs protection services and makes recommendations
- transfers the case to a case worker if further services are needed

d) *Social Worker/Case Worker/Child's Worker*

- coordinates the activities with the natural family and foster family
- reviews and evaluates progress of foster child and his/her family
- in consultation with others, makes major decisions about planning for the child and has primary responsibility for development of the child's case plan

e) *Social Worker/Crisis Worker/On Call Duty Worker*

- available after office hours. This may vary, please check with the social worker for the procedures used by the district office.
- investigates child abuse/neglect complaints
- responds to emergencies on existing child welfare cases
- if you are uncertain of the number to call in your area for emergencies, contact the Child Abuse Hotline by dialing the operator "0" and asking for Zenith 1234

f) *Social Worker/Child Welfare Consultant*

- recognized as having a great deal of training and experience in child welfare matters
- provides additional expertise to assist social workers with difficult decisions

g) *Social Worker/Native Resource Worker*

- provides information about Native resources
- provides some training and workshops

h) *Social Worker/Specialized Social Worker*

- in some offices, the social workers may have one type of speciality area, for example, a Handicapped Children's Services Worker, Adoption Worker, Foster Care Support Worker

When a Child Leaves a Foster Family

The child, foster family, natural family, social worker or court may initiate the move of a foster child. There are many reasons why a child may be moved. For example, the child's goals may have been achieved, there may be a change in the foster families' circumstances or a request for a change by the foster family. Also, the child may request a move by running away and refusing to return or the department may move a child so that brothers and sisters can be together.

Whenever possible, the move is planned in advance to prepare everyone involved. However, there are circumstances, such as the court's refusal to renew status or where the safety of the child is a concern, when little advance notice may be given of a child's removal from your home.

If a child's placement is creating problems for your family, please discuss the problems with the social worker. Notifying the social worker as soon as possible about difficulties can help prevent the placement from breaking down. Your request for assistance is considered a strength, not a weakness. If all supports and efforts have been exhausted, you may request the child's removal. You are required, as set out in the Foster Home Agreement, to give two weeks' notice. Advance notice allows time to find another appropriate placement. It is important to tell the child the reasons for requesting his/her removal from your home.

If a child runs away from your home, notify the social worker immediately. If the child's whereabouts are unknown, the police must be notified. The child may be returned to your care or may be placed elsewhere, depending on the circumstances.

When a child leaves your home, it is important to encourage the child to leave with a positive attitude, no matter what the reason for leaving. Working with the social worker is helpful in order for the move to be as easy for the child as possible.

Please remember to send along all records, information cards, clothing and personal belongings. Send a written daily schedule to help the child adjust to the next home.

Foster Parent Responsibility with the Department

Delegation of Authority

Authority to give consent to matters involved in the daily routine of providing care to foster children is delegated to foster parents through a signed “Delegation of Powers and Duties Form”. A signed form should accompany each child at the time of placement.

The form specifies the caregiver (foster parent), the child and the matters in which foster parents can provide consent. The matters may include the following:

- diet and dress
- ordinary medical and dental treatments (e.g. immunizations)
- enrolment of a child in school
- attendance at social activities (including field trips and camps)
- emergency medical treatment for children under C.A., T.G.O. or P.G.O. when the patient’s life would be jeopardized by the delay involved in contacting the social worker. In the event of an emergency, contact the social worker as soon as possible.

Matters to which you cannot consent include the following:

- major/elective medical treatment including abortion and sterilization
- change of religion
- change of name
- consent to obtain driver’s licence or a firearm permit
- emergency medical treatment for children under apprehension

The child’s social worker must provide or obtain consent in all non-delegated matters.

When a child is the subject of a Custody Agreement or Temporary Guardianship Order, you will find that consent for many matters is not delegated, it is retained by the natural parent who is guardian.

Confidentiality

It is important that foster families respect and protect each child's right to confidentiality. Just as social workers are bound by the Child Welfare Act in the sharing of information with others, so are foster families.

Foster families can share information with other professionals assisting in the child's care, such as a doctor, teacher, or psychologist. The information shared should be limited to information which is needed by the professional in providing the services. Only essential information is to be shared in order to ensure that the rights and dignity of the child and his/her family are not unnecessarily affected. You must not share information about the child with friends, relatives, other children in your home or the media. A child placed in your home is not to be photographed by the media, without the consent of the social worker. If you receive requests from the media, staff at the regional offices of Family and Social Services are available to help you in responding to these requests.

The foster home agreement, which all foster parents sign, highlights confidentiality. When in doubt about whether or not to share certain information and with whom, the foster parent should discuss the matter with the child's social worker.

Record Keeping

Your family often spends more time with a foster child than anyone else. Your family's observations and information are invaluable to professionals in making plans with the family, as well as for the child later in his/her life.

Why record?

- allows for a good method to retain daily information
- provides an organized way to supply factual information at case conferences and/or court.
- may be used to support opinions when discussing the child with the social worker
- may show patterns of behavior

What to record?

- all medical appointments, accidents or injuries, medications
- school progress, achievements
- contacts with natural family
- unusual behaviors of the child
- achievements/successes/celebrations
- when using discipline such as corporal punishment
- any other information you think may be relevant

How to record?

- you need not take a lot of time out of your already demanding day to record information

Here are some examples (hints) of how to record information:

- you may use point form
- dates and times are important
- try to describe incidents by the specific actions/behavior observed
- it is helpful to describe what happened before and after an event
- keep a separate notebook or folder for each child so the information remains confidential

Records should be reviewed with the child's social worker regularly.

When the child leaves your home, the records must be given to the child's social worker.

Your help in keeping report cards, drawings, awards, pictures, immunization records, medical information and mementos, ensures that memories and important events, people and places are not lost to the child. If it is anticipated that the child will stay in your home more than six months or he/she has already been with you for this length of time, you should talk to the social worker about starting a Memory/Life Book. The social worker will help you start a Memory/ Life Book for each foster child and will explain how to record the information. Memory/ Life Books are an important link to a child's past. If you are not aware of this type of book, please call the social worker and ask about it.

● **Case Plans/Case Conference**

● *a) Case Plans*

● When a child comes into care, it is important that arrangements for the child's future be considered. These arrangements form the basis of a case plan.

● The case plan specifies what supports and actions are required to ensure that the child may return to his/her family or other permanent arrangement. When returning home is not likely, it helps form an alternative permanent plan for the child. A clear case plan may help reduce the child's anxiety and uncertainty about what will happen to him/her while in care.

● The case plan details goals, tasks and roles. Goals are what have to be accomplished so the child may return home or move toward an alternate permanent placement. Tasks are what have to be done to reach the goal. Tasks are assigned to specific individuals and the individual's roles are outlined in the case plan.

● The case plan is prepared by the social worker once all available information is received.

● You are a critical part of the team in planning for the child. Information you have about the child is essential in developing a case plan and you are expected to be involved in its development. If you are not involved, please ask to be involved.

● As new information is available, make sure you advise the social worker. Case plans need to be updated to reflect changes as well as to assess whether goals have been reached.

● *b) Case Conference*

● Case conferences bring together individuals who have information about a foster child and/or his/her family and often include foster parents, teachers and psychologists. The purpose of the meeting is to share information and give an opportunity for those involved to contribute in planning for the child.

You are expected to attend case conferences. It is helpful to bring notes or other records that you have describing the child's behavior. Your information and opinions are welcome and essential in helping to broaden everyone's understanding of the child. The information that you receive from others will help you care for the child.

Court

Notice of a court hearing will be given to you when you have had the child in your home for at least six continuous months immediately prior to the hearing.

You may want to attend the hearing, or in some cases, you may be required to attend. If you attend court and make a presentation, focus on describing what you observed such as the child's behavior, reaction to visits and interaction between the child and the natural family. You may want to state how the child's behavior has improved, changed or how certain behaviors have persisted.

Please discuss your court presentation with the social worker prior to court. The social worker can assist you in preparing the information. Your opinions should not be presented unless asked for by the lawyer, judge or social worker. If you are asked for an opinion, support your opinion by describing a behavior you have observed.

It may be helpful to write down a few notes prior to giving a presentation or, if you have kept records, to review them.

Appeals/Reviews

You may disagree with some decisions made by a social worker and you are encouraged to discuss any disagreement with the social worker. Since the shared focus is the child's best interest, it is hoped that an agreement can be reached.

When agreement cannot be reached about what is in the best interest of the child, there are several alternatives available in order to attempt to change the decision. Note: Foster families cannot appeal court orders.

• a) *District Office Review*

• Often matters can be resolved by talking with the social worker, or you
• may meet with the social worker, the social worker's supervisor and, if
• necessary, the District Office Manager.

• b) *Administrative Review*

• In the event that the issue is still unresolved, any person who is affected
• by a decision may appeal it. The decisions which can be appealed are
• specified in the Child Welfare Act [Section 86(2)]. Ask the social
• worker if you are unsure which decisions can be reviewed.

• If you proceed with a review, you must complete and submit the
• required form within thirty days of receiving the decision. You can get
• the form from the district office. In most cases your review is carried out
• by the District Office Manager and one other employee from outside the
• office. The review committee can agree, reverse or vary the decision.
• The committee must let you know the decision within five working days
• of your request. After a decision is made from the Administrative
• Review, you have thirty days to request a further review or to apply for
• an appeal. The district office and Administrative Reviews do not prevent
• you from going directly to the Child Welfare Appeal Panel at any time.

• c) *Child Welfare Appeal Panel*

• This panel is the most formal method of appeal. You must have had the
• child in your continuous care for six of the preceding 12 months in order
• to appeal a decision concerning that child. Matters that may be appealed
• are specified in the Child Welfare Act [Section 86(2)]. Members of the
• Appeal Panel come from the general community and are not department
• staff. An appeal form, available from the district office, must be
• completed. It gives notice and sets the appeal process in motion. The
• social worker is available to help complete the form. The decision of the
• Appeal Panel can be appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench.

If you have questions about the Administrative Review or Child Welfare Appeal Panel, please contact your district office or contact Alberta Family and Social Services, Appeals and Advisory Secretariat at 427-2709.

Children's Advocate

The role of the Children's Advocate was established with the proclamation of the Child Welfare Amendment Act, September 1, 1989.

The Children's Advocate attempts to ensure that the views and interests of children are heard and represented. Children in care, or foster parents who are concerned about them, should contact the Children's Advocate when they feel that the views, needs, or interests of the child are not being represented or heard.

Who can the Children's Advocate help?

- children under apprehension status
- children who are under agreements or court orders
- children who were under agreements or court orders, within 30 days of the date of expiry of these documents

When do you make a referral to the Children's Advocate?

- when you believe that a child's needs are not being met
- when you believe that the child's rights are not being protected
- when you believe the child's viewpoint and interests are not being considered in planning or in making decisions for the child
- when all important relevant information is not considered

How do you make a referral to the Children's Advocate?

- referrals can be made directly to the Advocate in person, by telephone or in writing
- offices are located in Edmonton and Calgary. Edmonton staff will assist children in the Northeast, Northwest and Edmonton regions. Calgary staff will assist children in the Central, Calgary and South regions

- a toll-free telephone line, 1-800-661-3446, has been established so children in care, or people concerned about a child in care, can contact the Children's Advocate 24 hours a day

What will the Children's Advocate do with a referral?

- the Advocate will gather all available information. The Child Welfare Act provides the Advocate with full access to information. You may discuss all information with the Advocate and allow the Advocate access to the child
- the Advocate will attempt to resolve the matter
- when mutual agreement to resolve a problem cannot be obtained, a more formal means such as referral to the Deputy Minister, the Appeal Panel or the court system may be pursued
- the Advocate will explore whether the issue can be solved by the caller through the regional office system or other natural advocacy systems such as parents

Foster Care Supports

Financial Supports

The rates that may be claimed for basic maintenance, babysitting and vacation are reviewed annually. The annual Foster Parent Financial Letter, available to all foster parents, specifies the rates. If you have not received your Financial Letter, please notify the social worker.

a) Basic Maintenance

Foster families receive a basic maintenance rate which varies according to the age of the foster child. The basic rates provide for items such as food, clothing, personal care items, spending money, household costs, homeowner insurance coverage and miscellaneous items including birthday gifts, babysitting and general mileage.

Maintenance is claimed on a Child Maintenance Invoice. Your district office has a supply of the forms. The Child Maintenance Invoice is to be submitted each calendar month. Check with the social worker to find out the mailing address for the completed Maintenance Invoice. You should receive a cheque the following month. You may claim maintenance for the day the foster child is admitted to your home as well as the day the child leaves. When arrangements are made for a new placement in your home, maintenance may be paid for the times the child has had pre-placement visits to your home.

When a child is absent from your home but will be returning shortly (hospitalization, separate holiday or parental visit) you may claim the regular rate up to 10 days. In order to hold the bed, 50 per cent of the maintenance will be paid for an additional 20 days. No maintenance is paid after 30 days of the child's absence from your home.

Clothing

When placing a child in your home, you and the child's social worker should review the child's clothing, taking into consideration approaching seasonal needs. If the clothing is not of an acceptable standard, the social worker may issue an "Initial Clothing Order" (18R) by voucher or authorize you to purchase items up to a specified amount. You can claim this amount on your Maintenance Invoice.

It is your responsibility to maintain clothing after the department initially brings it to an acceptable standard. Clothing replacement costs due to normal growth and wear are included in the basic maintenance rate.

There are exceptional circumstances such as abnormal growth spurt, sudden weight gain/loss or a specific handicap that requires high cost clothing. These additional clothing orders may be approved. Graduation clothing may also be approved in addition to the basic maintenance.

Please remember that all reimbursements through your Maintenance Invoice need prior approval from the social worker. A letter of authorization from the social worker, with receipts, has to be attached to the Maintenance Invoice.

b) Special Rates

If the child you are caring for is severely handicapped (emotionally, physically, behaviorally, intellectually) and you are required to provide additional services, you may be considered for a special rate in addition to the basic maintenance rate.

A special rate schedule, outlining the extra services required, is completed jointly by the foster parent, social worker and foster care worker.

Please remember that the special rate is reviewed periodically and will vary with the child's progress. The purpose of special rates is to temporarily reimburse foster families for providing additional services to help reduce or eliminate a specific behavior. Once these services are no longer required, the special rates are discontinued.

c) Optional Accountable Advance

This program allows for a specified financial advance to foster families. The advance may be used when waiting for regular maintenance. If you stop fostering and/or your home is vacant for longer than three months, you will be asked to repay the advance. For details on the program, please contact the social worker.

d) School Supplies

A standard rate (according to the child's grade) is set each year for the purchase of school supplies in September. You may claim for supplies as early as July. Indicate on the Maintenance Invoice which grade the child will be starting.

If the standard rate does not cover all costs, the excess may be claimed on your Maintenance Invoice, providing you have receipts and a letter of authorization from the child's social worker.

Other educational items such as school pictures, bus passes and field trip fees, may also be reimbursed through the Maintenance Invoice, with a letter of authorization from the social worker and attached receipts.

e) Mileage/Transportation

Where a child has a series of appointments approved by the social worker and the total kilometres travelled are more than 100 km per month, you may make a mileage claim on your Maintenance Invoice. It is necessary to get a letter authorizing the payment from the child's social worker. The mileage rate is equal to the rate paid to provincial employees and is increased from time to time.

If the mileage travelled is likely to continue for several months with little change, a special rate may be considered in lieu of the claim through maintenance.

f) Christmas Gifts

Christmas gifts are provided to foster children through the basic maintenance rate. However, if you have children placed with you in November or December, you have not had the benefit of accumulating the gift portion of maintenance. You may claim a standard rate, according to the age of the child, providing you have a letter of authorization from the child's social worker, or you may request a voucher. The social worker will be able to advise you on the amount of the standard rate.

g) *Car Seats*

The law requires all children to be in a Canadian Standards Association (C.S.A.) approved car seat if they are under six years old or weigh less than 18 kilograms (40 pounds). If you have such a child placed in your home and do not have a car seat, please discuss this with the social worker. A car seat may be provided to you. The car seat remains the property of the district office.

h) *Homemaker/Babysitting Services*

Homemaker or babysitting services may be considered as a temporary emergency support if you are required to be absent due to personal illness or due to the death or marriage of an immediate family member. These services may also be available if you are caring for a severely handicapped/disturbed child and no other suitable child care arrangement can be made.

When a homemaker is brought into your home to look after your own children, the cost is shared between you and the department, based on the number of children you have. Special rates are not provided while a homemaker is in your home.

Babysitting costs may be provided while you attend some prescribed foster parent training. You must get approval in advance from the social worker.

i) *Respite (Relief) Care*

In recognition of the demands on foster families, a semi-annual respite care allowance has been established. It may be claimed on the March and September Child Maintenance Invoices. The respite care allowance is in addition to temporary emergency support and any negotiated special rates. The allowance can be claimed by every receiving, general, provisional, H.C.S. and parent counsellor home. To be eligible, you must have had a child in your home for at least three months of the six month claim period. The rates vary according to the number of children in your home. A copy of the respite care allowance letter outlining details on claiming will be provided to you by the social worker.

j) Other Special Costs

There are additional items not included in the basic maintenance rate, such as swimming lessons and sports equipment, that may qualify for payment. A request for approval must be presented by the child's social worker to the District Office Manager. If approval is granted, the social worker may make payment directly to the party involved through a voucher or reimburse you through your Maintenance Invoice. All reimbursements through the Maintenance Invoice must have a letter of authorization from the social worker and receipts attached.

Insurance/Damages

It is expected that all foster families will have their own insurance program to cover property and third party liability. A monthly allowance is included in the basic maintenance rates to share in the premiums paid for an insurance policy.

In addition to your own policy, a rider policy has been established to cover caring for foster children. The plan is administered through the Alberta Foster Parent Association (AFPA).

If there is damage caused by a foster child, submit a claim to your insurance company. If the claim is denied specifically because of a willful or criminal act on the part of the foster child, contact the AFPA office. Provide them with a brief explanation, estimate and date of damage, a copy of your policy and a letter from your insurance company denying payment of the claim.

Inquiries may be directed to the AFPA office in Edmonton at #1250, 10055 - 106 Street or phone 429-9923.

Vacation Expenses / Summer Camps

Once a year you may claim for vacation expenses in order to take a child on vacation with you or to pay for the child's attendance at camp. The claim will be added to your Maintenance Invoice. The claim should be

made a month prior to your vacation to ensure you will have the funds before leaving. The amount to claim is specified in your Foster Parent Financial Support Letter.

Please remember to obtain approval from the child's social worker prior to leaving. The social worker may need to discuss travel plans with the child's natural family and provide or obtain written consent. The social worker also needs to know where to reach you in case of an emergency.

If you are vacationing outside Alberta, you require the consent of the social worker and a letter of authority to travel. The letter will specify the period that you are out of the province and will verify that the child is under the care of the department. Please give at least two weeks notice to the social worker to allow for a letter to be completed. If travel outside Canada is approved and a passport/birth certificate is required, please request the passport/birth certificate through the social worker. The social worker will also need to verify that proper medical coverage is available and will need as much time as possible to process your request.

In some circumstances, your family may be travelling by a public transportation system. A request for payment of the fare is considered an exceptional expenditure and must be presented by the social worker to the District Office Manager for consideration. If approval is given, you would not be eligible to request the holiday claim as the fare can be higher than the holiday claim.

Medical Services/Alberta Health Care Insurance Coverage

When a child comes into care, a routine medical examination should be arranged as soon as possible. The child's social worker has medical forms to be completed by the physician. You may find it convenient to keep a supply of forms in your home. Unless otherwise directed, a child may go to your family doctor.

● Please keep a medical record card of the child's medical history while in
● your home. Include prescriptions, appointment dates, findings and
● recommendations. Accidents, illnesses or prescriptions must be reported
● to the social worker as soon as possible.

● A foster child generally receives an Alberta Health Care Insurance
● (AHCI) and Treatment Service card shortly after coming into care. An
● exception to this is a child under Custody Agreement, under
● Apprehension or with Registered Indian Status. These children receive
● full medical coverage, but it is provided differently. Please check with
● the social worker if you have questions or problems as sometimes there
● are coverage disputes which can delay payments.

● If you have a child with Registered Indian status, request the Indian
● Status number and the AHCI number from the child's social worker.
● The AHCI number will be the same number the child had before coming
● into care. Items such as medical, dental and optical services are covered
● under the Registered Indian Status number. Your social worker will
● explain how to use the Indian Status number.

● Under most Custody Agreements, the natural parents agree to provide
● medical coverage. Contact the social worker for clarification of who is
● to provide coverage before obtaining the medical service. You should
● receive the AHCI number at the time the child is placed in your home.

● Under court orders, the department usually assumes full responsibility
● for medical coverage. An AHCI number is applied for and a card is
● issued with the new number. An AHCI card should be provided to you.
● A Treatment Service card is provided to cover prescription, dental and
● optical services.

● Please ensure that the child's medical record, AHCI card and Treatment
● Service card are given to the social worker when the child leaves your
● home.

Alberta Foster Parent Association (AFPA)

The Alberta Foster Parent Association is a provincial association made up of local foster parent associations. The associations hold regular meetings and encourage all new foster families to become members.

The role of the Alberta Foster Parent Association is to support foster families, advocate for the rights of children, educate the community about foster care, provide and arrange for training and social gatherings and serve as a liaison between foster families and Alberta Family and Social Services.

The local associations promote awareness of fostering in their communities through programs and activities during Foster Family Week, Citation Award Dinners and a variety of social activities throughout the year. Local associations work together with Alberta Family and Social Services in recruitment, orientation and support of foster families.

The Alberta Foster Parent Association publishes a quarterly newsletter to inform foster families about fostering issues and activities throughout the province. The newsletter is available to all foster families. The provincial association acts as a link to Alberta Family and Social Services and to other foster families. For general information, membership, inquiries or information on the insurance plan, call 429-9923 or visit their office at Suite 1250, 10055 - 106 Street (Hong Kong Bank of Canada Building), Edmonton.

Training

Foster parents are challenged with child management problems that sometimes go beyond everyday parenting experiences. To assist you in providing quality care, Alberta Family and Social Services has made a commitment to provide ongoing training to develop foster parenting skills. This commitment begins by requiring all prospective foster parents to attend orientation training and continues with other training opportunities.

The various seminars, in-service training and workshops provide alternative methods of dealing with situations. They also offer a chance to meet other foster families. Babysitting costs may be approved for some prescribed foster parent training, providing prior approval is given by the social worker. Contact the social worker and/or local Foster Parent Association for details of courses offered in your area.

Support Services

No one expects foster families to carry the responsibility of foster care totally alone. Outside resources and support services may be available when needed. Social workers are available to visit your family and discuss problems. After office hours, there are emergency social workers available or, in some rural areas, the local R.C.M.P. detachment can be contacted. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance.

Foster Care Policy

Moving

It is important to notify the social worker well in advance if you are planning to move, regardless of the distance you move.

If you want the foster child to move with you, all circumstances are considered and a decision is made based on what is in the child's best interest. You must have the social worker's permission to have the foster child move with you.

Giving the social worker plenty of advance notice allows time to prepare the child for a change and when necessary, it gives the social worker time to match the child to another foster home.

If you don't have a foster child in your home at the time of a move, you must still notify the social worker so foster care records can be updated.

Discipline

The goal of discipline is to encourage appropriate behavior, discourage inappropriate behavior and encourage the child to develop self-control.

The children placed in your home come from a variety of backgrounds where discipline may have been severe and/or inconsistent. Each child responds differently. It is important to be aware of the variety of methods of discipline. Methods that teach more than 'control' behavior need to be emphasized. For example, rules and consequences must be clear and the consequences must be fair and consistent. Whatever methods you use, they must not be emotionally or physically harmful to the child.

Discuss the different methods of discipline that you use with the child's social worker. The social worker is available to help develop a specific plan for the child, or to connect you with resources that may help to deal with specific behaviors. Psychological assessments can often help in understanding why a child is misbehaving and may be helpful in developing a plan for managing behavior.

Physical discipline is inappropriate with most foster children. The way that you handle problems teaches the child how to handle his/her own problems. You become a model on which the child may pattern his/her own behavior. Physical discipline may show a child that the way to solve a problem is through violence. An alternative discipline method, such as confining the child to his/her room for a specified time, can show the child how to handle problems in a more positive manner.

The backgrounds of many foster children can contribute to their fragile self-esteem. Often the children do not feel good about themselves. Physical discipline can add to a child's feelings of humiliation. Given the serious implications of physical discipline, the use of such a method must be discussed with the social worker, preferably at the time of placement.

Training on specific behavior problems and management techniques is available. Please contact your local Foster Parent Association and/or the social worker for details.

Safety

In addition to everyday safety precautions, extra precautions are required to ensure the safety of foster children. Often the foster child comes from a background where little information is known. The emotional upset of being removed from the natural family's care contributes to unpredictable behavior. Specific guidelines have been developed to address some of the extra safety precautions required.

a) Weapons

Weapons (such as firearms) must be stored in a locked facility and stored separately from ammunition. If you have firearms, the social worker will reimburse you for the purchase of trigger locks.

It is important for the social worker who is arranging placement to know if you have weapons in your home.

b) Medications

All medications (prescription and non-prescription) must be locked up or made inaccessible if there is any chance of misuse by a child due to his/her age, emotional state, behavior, or lack of judgment.

The person in charge of giving out medication is to be determined by you and the social worker. The decision is made on an individual basis considering matters such as maturity of the child, type of medication and the need for self-administering (e.g. convulsions or diabetes).

When a child must self-administer his/her medication, the child is to receive necessary training from the professional who has prescribed the medication. The foster parent should accompany the child to the training.

When the child is going to be away from the foster home, for example, for a camping trip, the responsibility for administering medication should be given to a responsible adult, along with clear instructions on how the medication is to be administered.

You may request a pharmacist to package the child's medication in bubble packs for better control and accountability of the medication.

c) Cribs/Play Pens/Car Seats

All cribs/play pens/car seats must meet established safety standards. For details of the requirements, please contact Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs or the child's social worker/foster care worker.

d) Infectious Diseases

The best way to reduce the risk of disease is to wash your hands frequently, such as after changing diapers and before food preparation. As well, bodily fluids, particularly blood, semen and vaginal secretions can contain potentially infectious agents such as Hepatitis B, AIDS or other viruses. Appropriate steps should be taken to minimize excessive contact with bodily fluids. The social worker will advise you of any of the child's known needs.

Adoption

When a child cannot be returned home or placed with relatives, the possibility of adoption may be explored. If you are interested in adopting a child who has been placed in your home, make your intentions known to the social worker. However, the fact that you foster a particular child does not guarantee adoption of that child.

When an adoption plan is in place, your support for the child and the plan is important. Your cooperation with all pre-adoption visits is essential. Equally important is your role in preparing the child for separation from your family and beginning with another family. It is understandable that you may feel sad at the thought of separating. Let the child know that you will miss him/her but that you also support him/her in leaving and having new parents. If you need to talk about your feelings, or the child's feelings and behavior, contact the social worker.

The Memory/Life book (see page 16) you have been keeping for each child, may help you say goodbye by putting together pictures and other mementos of the good times you shared. The child will always be able to look back and remember those times. You will have provided another valuable bridge between the child's past and future. Your social worker can provide you with suggestions on what to include in the Memory/Life Book.

Post adoption support is available to assist you as a foster family if you wish to adopt a child who is currently in your care. The quality of your relationship with the child and your commitment to him/her are the key considerations. If you wish to adopt a child who is in your care and the adoption would place an undue burden on your financial resources, financial support may be available. You may also be able to obtain financial support if a child's special needs require a number of additional services.

If you are approved to adopt the child in your home, you may continue to claim maintenance payments until the adoption is finalized and the papers filed in court.

Generally, no new foster children will be placed in your home while you are in the process of adoption

Appendix

Appendix A

Information Card

1. **Child's Name:**

2. **Birthdate:**

3. **Height/Weight:**

4. **Allergies:**

5. **Medical Information:**

date of appointments
names of doctors
recommendations
medications - type, who administers
immunizations
type formula (infants)
special needs

6. **Developmental Accomplishments:**

emotional, physical, behavior
Example

- Sam was able to express his anger by talking about what was bothering him rather than by throwing the book
- when walked, sat up, rode bike
- this is the first day that Jim did not scream and kick when told not to push Mary

7. **Achievements/Activities/Hobbies:**

Example

- Brownies/Cubs
- swimming level
- sports awards: date, name of sport
- Confirmation/Baptismal Certificate
- cultural/heritage involvement

8. **Likes/Dislikes/Fears:**

Examples.

- loves sports, reading, western movies, favorite toy
- dislikes carrots, sleeping in the dark, getting ears wet
- fears loud noises

9. **Education:**

name of school, teacher
grade, level, program
comments: best subjects, good efforts, likes to play with others, prefers to play alone

10. **Habits/Routines:**

meals, bedtime - sleeps with night light, teddy bear
sleep disturbances - bedwetting, nightmares
visits with natural family - effect on behavior

11. **Other:**

Any other comments that may be relevant to the next caregiver and/or for the child's record of events while in your home.

Foster Parent's Signature

Date of child's
arrival in your home

Date of child's departure
from your home

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Notes



Notes



Information Card

1. Child's Name:

2. Birthdate:

3. Height/Weight:

4. Allergies:

5. Medical Information:

6.

Alberta

FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

foster
family
HANDBOOK

N.L.C. - B.N.C.



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